Chapter 2: Social and Cultural study of Thailand

The Southeast Asia consists of tropical lands and oceans ranging from The Southern China to Eastern India. The region of South-East Asia is divided into two distinct parts the mainland (Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Peninsular Malaysia) and the Islands (Taiwan, Philippines, East Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei). These Islands form a horseshoe around the peninsular and also serve as a series of stepping stones to Australia. Indonesia and Philippines are surrounded by many islands. Malaysia is located in the Borneo Island. There are six countries situated entirely on the mainland namely Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Burma and Thailand which was previously known as Siam.

The modern nations of Southeast Asia contain a total population of over 450 million people, comprising of a number of ethnic groups (Bellwood 2004: 4-5). In recent times, some of these peoples, particularly in coastal and riverside wet rice growing areas, are present in large numbers. These areas have a history marked with attainment of high levels of political and socio-cultural complexity. Such people include the Thais, Malays, Khmers, Vietnamese, Javanese and Balinese, to name the largest names of the population. The other smaller groups are the tribes living with hunter gathering activities in Malay Peninsula and Indonesian Islands. Besides the numerically dominant low lands pastorals people and hunters, here are other groups of farming populations, normally located in rugged uplands and remote areas, whose life style, tradition and pattern of diversity contributed to one of the richest ethnographic records in the world.

In Southeast Asia the significant character of Multi-cultural societies is clearly found in the countries where there has been a sharing of historical background since prehistoric times. For centuries the people in this region had developed their cultural traditions, especially religion and art, with Indian influence. The countries in the mainland mostly have their borders connected to others providing transportation and spread of cultural assimilation among people. Thailand is one of the countries which have developed her own political history and culture along with the great neighboring states from early historical period like Cambodia (Khmer), Indonesia (Javanese) and The Mons of Southern Burma. Thus, having multicultural characters, the ancient states located in the present Thailand territory before 11th century A.D. were mainly influenced by Indian tradition. This influence can be seen from the rich heritage spread across the country in the form of Hindu or Buddhist monuments and sculptures. These evidences, especially through the iconographical study of Brahmanical deities reflect the Indianized tradition, and belong to a
particular period from the early 5th century to 13th century A.D. This time also marks the glorious period when the various sects of Hinduism were being practiced in the ancient states, before the upcoming of Union Thai (Sukhothai) Kingdom.

2.1 Thailand: Geography and Topography

Thailand is in the mainland of Southeast Asia and is in the middle of mainland Indo-Chinese peninsula. On the north it is bounded by China and Burma; on the east by Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam and the southern peninsular is enclosed by Malaysia. Thailand approximately covers a land area of 513,115 square kilometers and extends about 1,650 kilometers from the north to south and 775 kilometers from east to west. (Directorate of Jointed Civil Affair 1999: 5)
The country is divided into 4 main parts the northern, southern, central and northeastern Thailand. Thailand at present has 77 provinces. The climate is tropical with long hours of sunshine and humidity. There are 3 seasons: Summer is from March to June, Monsoon from July to October and winter starts from November till January. The favorable geographical and climatic conditions make the country suitable for the cultivation of wide range of tropical and semi-tropical crops.

**Geography of Thailand**

Northern Thailand geographically combines multiple mountain ranges, continuing from the Shan Hills which border Myanmar and Laos, and the river valleys which cut through them. The majority of Thailand is located relatively at high altitude and latitude, which contributes to more pronounced seasonal temperature variation with cooler winters as compared to other regions.

There are Parallel mountain ranges extending from the Daen Lao Range in the southern region of the Shan Hills, from the north to south direction, the Dawna Range forming the western border of Thailand between Mae Hong Son province and the Salween River. Towards the east there are highland areas formed by the ranges. These high mountains are incised by steep river valleys and upland areas that border the central plain. A series of rivers flow southwards through mountain valleys and finally become the great Chao Phraya river at Nakhon Sawan province of central region. The Northeastern part is drained by smaller rivers flowing into the Mekong basin. The four-region system includes the northern parts of the Central Plain as well as some mountainous areas bordering the western and the northeastern limits.

Since the prehistoric times, the north has had evidences of community settlements spreading along caves on mountains inhabited by hunter gathering society while the lower basin belonged to the agricultural society. During the early historic period, the habitation areas had extended from the lower river basin up to the plains between mountains due to the increase in population. Therefore, on this basis the cultural developments of communities in the northern part can be divided into two major groups based on the location of their settlement, upper and lower basins (Indrawooth 2002: 19-33).

The North-Eastern area is almost hilly and arid because of the emergence of western and southern mountain ranges. This region contains saucer-shape plateaus with the great river Maekhong as its eastern boundary. It is the largest part of this country. This region consists of two large and important basin areas which are Sakon Nakhon basin
(Northern basin) and Korat Basin (Southern basin). These two planes are separated by the Phu Phan Mountains. Generally, the soil texture is mostly sandy, with substantial salt deposits.

This part of the country is close to the neighboring countries, Laos and Cambodia, which have been sharing the historical background and cultural influences from the early historical period.

The Korat basin: Most of the area in this region contains plateaus. The widest one is the vast arid field known as Tung Kula Rong Hai area which covers many provinces. There are important rivers such as the Mun and Chi Rivers with their branches flowing to Maekhong River at the east.

The Sakon Nakhon Basin: This basin is smaller than the Korat Basin. This has two important rivers- Songkham and Pung rivers which flow into the Maekhong River at the east. There are important natural lakes such as Nong Han (Sakon Nakon province) and Bung Kumphawapi (Udonthani province).

Northeastern Thailand was well developed with agricultures and other crafts like weaving, metallurgy and pottery before the coming of the historical period. This region was initially under Dvaravati culture during the 6th-8th century A.D. During the 10th -12th century, the northeastern plateau was largely dominated by ancient Khmer Kingdom in both political and cultural aspects.

The Central plain region is a vast alluvial plain called the Chao Phrya Basin. Most of the parts are flooded during the rainy season. The basin has numerous rivers, canals and streams. Bangkok is located at a distance of four kilometers from the principle river, Chao Phrya. The city’s location is convenient for providing many accommodations which leads to the country prosperity.

The Southern region represents the small hilly area, which is rich in tin and rubber plantations. It is made up of about two-thirds of the Malay peninsular which has ranges of mountains as its backbone on either side of coastal plains. The eastern coast has many short rivers. These rivers always flow and bring pebbles, soil and sand down from the higher place to the low land; therefore, the sediment has piled up and become small delta. The eastern coast water resources are more fertilized than the western coast which is rich of forest and mineral, especially tin. Moreover, the geographical setting of the western coast is in the line of wind way (monsoon wind) that suitable for sailing to countries in the west in
the ancient time like Burma, Sri Lanka, and India and Arabian territories (Indrawooth 2002: 211).

**The people of Thailand**

All of the native people of Southeast Asia have ancestries, in terms of languages and prototype, firmly grounded in this region; this become very clear when we examine the languages and physical appearance. The reference of language groups are intimately correlated with the cultural and geographical origins of different people (Bellwood and Glover 2004: 9-11; Wurm and Hattori 1983; Blench and Spriggs 1998). At this point, the main five ethno-linguistic families in Southeast Asia are *Tibeto-Burman* (western mainland Southeast Asia), Austroasiatic languages (*Khmer*, Vietnamese, *Aslian* languages of Peninsular Malaysia, Nicobar and *Munda* in India), *Hmong-Mien* languages (Hmong and Mien tribes), *Austronesian* languages (Southern China, Taiwan, Pacific island, southern Vietnam and Peninsular Malaysia). The last group is *Tai* (Daic) and *Kadai* languages (Southern China, Thailand and Laos).

The people of Thailand are called “Thai”; the great majority of them belong to the Thai race which forms the same ethnic group similar to the Laotians of Laos. At the Northeastern Thailand, *Shan* area of Upper Burma region, Southern China, Northern Vietnam and Assam, there are also Thai minorities scattering over the large area. The Ethnological and Anthropological aspects reveal that Thais primarily belong to Mongoloid family. In the early stages of historical period, Thais intermingled generously with their several forerunners- the *Mon* and *Khmer* linguistic groups, the *Mon* of lower Burma and Khmer of Cambodia. Thais also intermixed with the Indonesian linguistic group, Malays and *Cham* of South Vietnam, Indian and Chinese in the beginning of the historical phase.

In present times, we can find the minority ethnic groups of people in Thailand to comprise of more than 15 million Chinese, 700,000 *Malays* and also hill-tribesmen, who live in the mountains of The North. *Malays* in the South inhabit particularly the provinces near the Malaysian border. The Chinese and Indian have been found in Bangkok and other provincial towns and are usually engaged in commerce or skilled trades. (Jermsawatdi 1980: 3).
2.2 Social and Cultural development in Thailand: Prehistory and Historical period

Thailand is one of the oldest human habitats in the great Asia. The extensive excavations in this country have given a large number of archaeological evidences. These have produced artifacts of various kinds used by prehistoric man, indicating the social and cultural development of the people during their times. Very little is known of the culture of the early Pleistocene in Thailand (20,000-13,000 B.C.). An excavation pertaining to this period at Lampang province, northern Thailand, was carried out by Sorenson (1976) and Pope (1981: 147-43).

At the site, a few artifacts were found. They are simple cobble tools known as Chopper—Chopping tools and few flakes. Other site of this period is Lang Rong Rien Rock shelter in Krabi province, southern Thailand, considered to be the flake tools industry of the late Pleistocene. Comparative study of core stone and flakes tools has revealed the technical similarity with the tools found at Tabon cave (Philippines), Niah caves (Sarawak: Malaysia) and Nguom and Mieng Ho in Vietnam (Bronson and Chareonwongsa 1988: 11).

Thus, Anderson (1988: 43-60) suggests that Hoabinhian—like industries in Thailand may all in fact be quite young (13,000-12,000 B.C.) and that Lang Rong Rien type tools may have been dominant in earlier period of Hoabinhian culture. The Mesolithic period in Thailand started from 10,000 to 4,000 B.C., The significant features of this period is the making of bifacial cobble tools known as “Hoabinhian” culture and simple burials found at Sai-Yok Cave in Kanchanaburi province, western Thailand.

Furthermore some excavated sites in Northern Thailand at Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai, and Loburi and Ratchaburi, central provinces, unearthed some pebble tools in primitive clipped form. These artifacts bear close resemblance to those of rough Hoabinhian culture in Vietnam and belong to the same group of artifact of the Mesolithic and late Paleolithic cultures in Eastern part of the Asia including India.

The Neolithic period

This period is about 5,000 – 6,000 years ago (Natapintu 2002: 3). One of the important and good examples of Neolithic sites in Thailand is Ban-Kao in Kanchanaburi province, and Khok Phanom Di in Chonburi province (Higham et al.1987: 148-177). The archaeologists brought to light 38 extended burials and 12 fragmentary ones. The grave goods in this site are black potsherds and polished axes etc. These artifacts reflect that they
belong to the Neolithic age of eastern part, contemporary with that of some regions in South-East Asia.

The Metal period

The Metal Age remains in Thailand are scanty and sporadic in their occurrence. However, the discovery of 7 bronze drums belonging to Dongson culture of Vietnam has been found from the southern provinces of Thailand with other artifacts. These drums help in dating the Metal age of this country to around 3,000 years B.C. or 5,000 years ago.

Around 4,000-4,500 years ago, agricultural villages were considerably used as both habitation and ceremony areas in certain parts of Thailand. Inhabitants of some villages already practiced agriculture. The prehistoric agriculturalist in Thailand generated pottery of several forms. In certain areas, potteries with unique characteristic features for specific communities were regularly used. Thus, these cultural artifacts imply that the populations might have started following separate ethnic groups, during this period.

However, the similarity in polished stone tools and ornaments made of stone and marine shell were commonly found in most of the early villages, suggesting that the groups were not totally isolated from each other. On the contrary, they made contacts and might have well exchanged their products and cultures. Then in the later period around 3,500 years ago, well developed bronze metallurgy appeared in Thailand especially in the Northeast region. Obviously, inter-regional and cultural exchanges developed and quite intensive (Natapintu 2002: 10).

Around 2,500-2,700 years ago (500 B.C.), iron became a common raw material for tool and weapon making. The use of iron seems to have begun early in Northeastern Thailand which has produced the radiocarbon dates for iron associated deposits to be older than 500 B.C. (Bronson and Chareonwongsa 1988: 13) Inter-regional exchange became more regular and intensive which linked every part of Southeast Asia. Consequently, a number of major cultural centers were developed at quite a few locations in Southeast Asia during the first few centuries of the Buddhist era.

The end of the prehistoric period and the beginning of protohistoric period occurred when the people in Thailand started contact with the literate, history writing foreigners like the Indian, Chinese, Arab and Roman. The evidences for proto-historic contacts rests not only on the literary references in foreign writings of the early Christian century A.D., but also on various sources of artifacts like bronzes, seals, glass, carnelian and agate beads. The
arrival of trade connection gradually brought more sophisticated culture and technology to the primary chiefdoms that later on developed their own administrative functions leading to the growth of states mainly influenced by Indian tradition.

**The Pre-Urbanization period:**

The growth of early civilization was the consequence of the social development from prehistoric period and intensive external trade which constantly brought and exchanged Indian culture to the local people in this region. Owing to the fertile alluvial basin of the central part, the settlement of agricultural communities appeared at the end of the prehistoric phase (the 3rd B.C- 3rd century A.D.). Besides land cultivation, people in these communities also learned the metallurgic techniques and even sold them to the nearby communities. Furthermore, in the central region, there were some evidences from the late Prehistoric archaeological sites such as Ban Kao, Ban Don Ta Phet (Kanchanaburi province), Noen Makok (Lopburi province) and Kok Raka (Chonburi province) showing important trace of the locals having cultural-exchange along the trade with foreigners, especially Indians and Mediterraneans.

Due to flourishing of inter-cultural impact, from the 4th A.D onward, the period of early-Urbanization or state forming was evidently concentrated in three main parts of this country namely, Dvaravati, Sri Vijaya and Khmer cultural dominant period (Lopburi).

**The Dvaravati state:** (5th century – early of 10th century A.D)

The Dvaravati state with its center believed to be in the heart of central part of Nakon Pathom or U-thong (Supanburi province) had gradually expanded its political power over whole central part and some areas of the Northeastern part. The “Dvaravati” was named after the silver coins depicting the name which was probably to be the name of state “Sri Dvaravati”.

The large settlement of this period in Central part of the country probably started from seventh century C.E. (Indrawoot 1999: 228) found large numbers of moat sites located along the central plain. According to Vanasin and Supajanya (1980), the sea level was higher at that time, and so the settlements were accessible by the sea shore.

Most sites were also located along the rivers, therefore the natural water sources supplied to the circular moats. Generally, the large sacred monuments were constructed within the moats, while the smaller ones were built outside the enclosures. Major moat sites
have been discovered at the central basin like Nakhon Pathom, U Thong and Ku Bua. In the eastern parts there are also found similar type of sites like Sri- mahosot, Muang Phra Rot and Dong Lakorn as well as in the lower Chao Phraya basin at Dong Khon, Muang Bon, U-Ta-Pao and Thap Chumphon (Indrawoot 1999:228).

The origin of Dvaravati settlement is still a controversy as to whether this pattern was inspired by Indians or the locals. According to archaeological survey, so far there is no discovering of any evidence of moat settlement before Dvaravati period. Hence, it could be a result of Indian influence. Quaritch Wale (1969: 1-20) has pointed out that the Dvaravati town planning is an improvement from the irregular pattern and is more or less a circular or oval nuclei.

In spite of its unclear origin, Dvaravati has been considered to be the earliest Buddhist state, especially in Theravada sect, and an important foundation of Indian influenced school of art. The people were strict Buddhists and communicated with the glorious Buddhist center in neighboring countries like Pyu, Mon and Sri Vijaya state. Knowledge in higher technology was developed such as moats and earthen walls were built surrounding the outskirts of the city to contain water for irrigation and transportation. Metals like bronze and iron were melted to produce various kinds of tools. The pottery was mostly made of high grade clay. There were many prosperous ancient sites in this period such as Nakhon Patom, Ku Bua (Ratchaburi), U-Thong (Suphan Buri), Sup Champa (Lopburi), Chansen (Nakhon Sawan) and Dong Sri Maha Phot (Prachina Buri).

The Dvaravati Kingship is seen in the coinage legend. The discovery of inscribed silver coins from main Dvaravati sites such as Nakhon Pathom, U-Thong in Supanburi province and Ku Bua in Rachaburi province (Indrawooth 1999: 229) indicates that kingship really existed during the Dvaravati time. On the observe of each coin are engraved Indian symbols of fertility and prosperity such as purnaghata (brimming vessel with creepers) or animals (cow or deer) with its offspring. On the reverse the inscribed legend is “Sri dvaravati svarapunya” meaning “meritorious deeds of the King of Dvaravati”. Besides inscribed coins, there are found number of plain silver coins without inscribed legend distributed over vast area. Such coins bear Indian symbol of kingship and prosperity such as rising sun or sankha (conch shell) and srivatsa from U-thong (Supanburi province) and Chansen (Nakhon Sawant province). The Kings intended to centralize and developed the economy of the state and also enhance their position as the organized chief.
Although the Dvaravati Kings were devout Buddhists, there is evidence that they were exalted far above ordinary mortals through the magical power of *Rajsuya*, Royal consecration, which imbued the King with the divine power. Some rare artifacts have been discovered related to the Royal ceremony, such as stone tablet found at Nakhon Pathom province or tray depicting Royal insignia and ivory or bone dices from *Nern Makok*, Lopburi province. According to *Satapata Brahmana*, these religious objects might have been used in serial rituals performed during *Rajsuya* ceremony.

Furthermore, the stone tablets depicted royal insignia with small circular receptacle in the middle, which was presumably intended to hold the powder. Boeles (1964 : 100-102) stated that the royal trays might have been used for holding holy water pot which used in royal rituals like the besprinkling ceremony known as “*Abhisecaniya*” during the *Rajsuya*.

The similar kind of insignia tray was also discovered at an archaeological site at Arakan state of Burma. The receptacle tray was found along with bronze vessel. Thus it can be surmised that the trays found in Thailand were related to *Rajsuya* ceremony.

The concept of the King in Dvaravati period perhaps was regarded as Cakravatin, the universal Emperor, mentioned in *Cakkavattisihanada Sutta* (*Digha Nikaya* 3, 58 ff.) and as practiced by King Asoka (Indrawooth 1999: 232). This is seen through the discovery of stone *Dharmacakra* (the wheel of law) which symbolizes the Universal Empire found along with Buddha images and Buddhist structural ruins of the typical Dvaravati style. The stone wheels are found at main Dvaravati sites of central, northeastern (*Muang Sema, Fa Daed, Na Dune*), northern (*Haripunjaya*) and southern region (*Chaiya* and *Yarang*). Thus, it can be assumed that the King of Dvaravati might have been influenced from the ideal of Buddhist King as it was well followed by The Emperor Asoka of the third century B.C.

Later on during the 10th century-12th century A.D., the *Khmer* empire started growing up from the capital at Angkor area and expanded its political power to the Northeastern part of Thailand, in the time of the downfall of central power. The *Mahayana* sect of Buddhism was seen in the central region caused by the expansion of *Khmer* political power. Many of the *Mahayana* Buddhism architectures and sculptures have been found mostly in the lower part of central region like Prachina Buri, Phetchabun, Lopburi, Ratchaburi and Kanchanaburi.
The Sri Vijaya state. (7th century -12th century A.D)

In the earlier days during 3rd B.C. to 2nd century A.D., groups of people had settled down on the Southern peninsular, practically on the river basins that joined the sea. The inhabitants almost earned their living from fishing and agriculture. Stone and metal instruments have been found in this region since the pre historic times. Not only had the development of the tools, pottery making skill also developed.

In the Southern part of Thailand, from the 5th to 7th century A.D. coastal states were established contemporary to Dvaravati during the time of intensive maritime trade route which the state’s location evidently encouraged and also the cultural impact from the outsiders. Initially the state was the trading center owing to its geographical advantage, especially in the western coast and Malay Peninsula. At this time the Indian settlements in the port sites had been spreading their own religious culture, Buddhism and Brahmanism, to the local people. The social organization gradually developed from pre urbanize to state forming. Besides being a commercially important region, this area became the centre of glass beads industry, obviously seen in some excavated sites like Khao Sam Kheaw (Chun phon) and Klong Tom (Krabi).

Later on in the 7th to 9th century A.D, the Sri Vijaya kingdom really flourished in this region as a result of trade route controlling. The Sri Vijaya was believed to be a vast area extending from the Java Islands (Palembang) covering all of Malay Peninsula including southern part of Thailand. The people mostly belonged to Mahayana Buddhism which can be clearly realized from the King of Sri Vijaya stone inscription, recording the construction of three brick monuments dedicated to the lord Buddha and Bodhisattava. In addition, the Buddhist art objects have been found from the glorious period of Sri Vijaya and this style of art shows some influence from Dvaravati culture in the central part of the country and Khmer art during the 10th to 13th century A.D.

Finally during the 13th-17th century A.D, the South was invaded by the Thai kingdom which established its permanent capital city at Sukhothai and secondly at Ayuthaya kingdom in the central region. Hence, this area became to be known as the Theravada Buddhist region same as the capital. Moreover, the South area, Nakon Srithammarat province, was believed to be the first place where the Theravada sect from Sri Lanka arrived in this country.
In the 15th century A.D, Islamism religion from Malaysia reached the South region, due to the downfall of Majapahit Hindu Kingdom of Indonesia. The growth of Muslims has been found from the number of mosques and tomb stones. In spite of the widespread Islamism from the 15th century, this region still remains an important center of Buddhism in its central and northern region and Buddhism also has been spreading widely among the locals, except in some districts in the deep south.

**The Khmer dominant period: Lopburi Culture**; The Khmer cultural dominant region. (9\(^{th}\) -13\(^{th}\) century A.D.)

During the time of early-state forming period, before 6\(^{th}\) -10\(^{th}\) century A.D, the Northeastern region of this country had been influenced by *Dvaravati* culture which extended its cultural manipulation from the central area. This can be obviously seen through the town planning tradition and style of arts. In the early stages of this region, the locals preferred to follow Buddhism that initiated from the central base which witnessed continuous inter-cultural relationship with India. Thus, *Sanskrit* and early-south Indian letters like *Pallava* style are found in various inscriptions that have been discovered in this region.

Although, the basis of traditions was derived from *Dvaravati* culture, the locals adapted and modified their own inventions by means of the combination of *Dvaravati* arts and regional beliefs. For example, as the *Jataka* or life of the Buddha were carved on the facet of huge flat stone while the tradition of huge stone usage had been found earlier in Megalithic period in prehistoric time.

Later on in the 6\(^{th}\) century A.D, there was the period of Khmer dominance which gradually occupied over the whole mouth of *Mun* river and became distinctly a Khmer cultural region during the 10\(^{th}\) - 11\(^{th}\) century A.D. as the result of its influence appearing in almost all of this area. The arrival of Brahmanism in the northeastern part was coming along with the glories of Khmer empire in Cambodia. Undoubtedly, many of Khmer architectural style Hindu monuments had been erected in various parts of this region due to the strong political power from the heart land of Khmer civilization, *Angkor* state.

Then during the 11\(^{th}\) - 12\(^{th}\) century A.D, due to the invasion of King *Suryavarman* I who occupied the entire of Northern plateau and some part of central Thailand, the Khmer

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1. “*Lopburi culture*” : This term has been used in the meaning of Khmer art and heritages in Thailand where used to be under the political governance from ancient Cambodian empire during 7\(^{th}\) -13\(^{th}\) century A.D. The Lopburi culture covers the majority area of Northeastern and some part of Central and Eastern Thailand.
influence was seen all over these regions. In this region, not only Saivism and Vaisnavism, but also another sect of Mahayana Buddhism from Cambodia had flourished in this region especially in the reign of King Jayavarman VII of Angkor state. The spread of this sect has been depicted in many monuments which were erected during the 11th-12th century A.D. not only the spread of Buddhism, but the trade relationship between the Khmer empire and Sung Dynasty of China was also on the rise during this period. The improvement in the quality local ceramic production was the result of cultural exchange. The school of arts throughout the time of Khmer cultural influence has been known as “Lopbhuri art” or “The Khmer art in Thai”.

During the 13th - 17th century A.D, though this region belonged to Ayuthaya kingdom, the second Thai state, it was influenced by Lanchang culture from Laos and had wildly extended over Khong river basin. The Theravad sect of Buddhism was derived from Lanna and Sukhothai Kingdoms. Thus, the cultural tradition of the northeastern region became the combination of local beliefs and Buddhist Theravad sect. Moreover, the cultural impact from Laos is also obviously seen in especially in the northern part of the region that is really close to Laos’s border.

The Historical period; the establishment of Thai Kingdom:

*Sukhothai Kingdom:* (1238 (?) - 1370 A.D.)

In the preceding centuries, from 13th century A.D, Thais had been forming their first kingdom in the lower part of Northern region and covered all central part of the country, during the downfall of ancient Cambodian empire whose political power used to be extend over whole of central and northeastern parts of Thailand. The first Thai Kingdom named as “Sukhothai Kingdom” was established in 1283 A.D according to legend and royal inscriptions. The development of Thai scripts has been found in the first stone inscription of King Ram Kham Heang who was the great King of Sukhothai dynasty due to his skill of warfare and invention of the Thai scripts. During this period of glory, Sukhotai kingdom had commercial relationship with Chinese court of Sung Dynasty., thus, leading to the development in ceramic production and immense ceramic trade among Thai Kingdom and neighboring countries.

Although The King and his people mostly was Buddhist, Theravada sect from Srilanka, the rituals of Brahmanism were still being practiced and believed among Thais. This has been contextually seen in some inscriptions which mentioned Brahmanical beliefs
and Hindu sculptures that were found during this period. Evidently, Brahmanism in Sukhothai Kingdom was influenced and transferred from ancient Cambodia, as seen from Sukhothai Hindu sculptures that revealed the combination of Thai and Cambodian art.

The political administration in this kingdom was merely organized by Kingship system, but the position of Kings in the earlier period was in the form of “The great father of the state” as seen by the formal name as “Poh Khun Ram kham heang” or “Poh Khun Bang Mung”. Unlike the ancient Cambodian Kingship, where the Kings had been regarded as “Devaraja” meaning the incarnation of Gods according to Khmer Brahmanism.

Later on when the Kingdom expanded and got populated due to the expansion of state territory, it led to complexity in the social sphere. Therefore, the position of King had to be revolutionized from “The great Father of the State” to “The great King of the state”. This alternation has been found in his title as “Phraya Lithai” or “Phrya Sai Rul Thai”. Although the position of Kingship was really close to ancient Cambodian tradition, the Sukhothai Kings were the great devotee of Buddhism, Theravada sect. In the reign of King Lithai (1347-1346 A.D.), Buddhism was applied in the state administration and population governance.

The Sukhothai Kingdom had reached its highest peak of political grandeur during the reign of King Ram kham heang to King Lithai. After this period, their successors were very weak and incapable of administering the kingdom. The Sukhothai Kingdom declined due to political weakness in the middle of 14th century and was annexed into Ayudhaya Kingdom, the new state which had formed in the lower part of central region or Chao Phraya Basin.

The Lanna Kingdom: (1296-1567A.D.)

Lanna Kingdom was located in the upper part of the northern region. This state was formed at the same time as Sukhothai Kingdom and had very close relationship with each other. King Mangrai, the founder of Mangrai Dynasty of Lanna, established Chaing Mai as the state capital city.

The Lanna Kingdom reached its peak in the 15th century, with the flourishing of Buddhism and cultural exchange between the neighboring countries like Burma and Laos. After the downfall of Sukhothai at the lower part, Lanna had to protect itself from Ayudhaya

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2 “Poh Khun” means Great Father of the chiefs. Ram kham heang is the King’s name.

3 “Phraya” means the Great one or The King, Lithai is the King’s name.
invasion, which was politically strong. Thus, Lanna always took the help of neighboring Kingdoms for military and their diplomatic association in order to keep the balance of power with Ayudhaya Kingdom. Since 1558 A.D., the Lanna Kingdom had been dependent on the Burmese government for almost 300 years; then it was annexed to Rattanakosin Kingdom.

**The Ayudhaya Kingdom:** (1350-1767 A.D)

Toward the close of the 14th century A.D., the Sukhothai Kingdom witnessed decline and King U-Thong of Suphanaphum dynasty, once under the Sukhothai domination, proclaimed his state as independent from Sukhothai’s political power. He established his capital at the town called Sri Ayutthaya, South of Sukhothai territory. This Kingdom which lasted 417 years was ruled over by 33 kings. During this period, there were several serious wars with Burma and Cambodia known as one of the great capital city in mainland Southeast Asia, Ayudhaya had close relationship with China and western countries like Arab, Portugal, France and Netherlands. Hence, the international trade mounted up, especially in spices and Asian rare goods market. Due to the prosperity of the state economy, various kinds of Arts were given much patronization by the court and noble family.

The Ayudhaya Kingdom met its downfall after the heaviest invasion from Burmese enemy in 1767. Then Thais established their new capital at Thonburi which was located at the opposite site of Bangkok.

**The Thonburi Kingdom:** (1767-1782 A.D.)

The Thonburi Kingdom was established by the King Tak-Sin. After the great chaos of warfare, he reconstructed the new capital and tried to maintain Thai political independence from Burma. During the 15 years of hard labour, the King endeavored to retrieve the grace of Ayudhaya cultures. After his reign, Thais suddenly relocated their capital city to Bangkok and established Rattanakosin Kingdom.

**The Rattanakosin Kingdom:** (1782 A.D. onward)

The King Rama I, founder of Chakri dynasty and Rattanakosin Kingdom, ordered to reconstruct his capital following the Ayudhaya. In addition to town planning, the political administration and legal activities were also followed the former tradition.
After the period of King Rama III, there was the new age of Thai history. King Rama IV had given his support on worldwide economic relations with western countries like Great Britain, America and France. Due to the advantage of trade, the development of country in various aspects had been steadily growing in the reign of King Rama V, especially in sciences technology, social prosperity and education system. Thus, it can be stated that Thai society had been influenced by the western counties in almost all aspects and reached the modern period after the reign of King Rama VII up to the present time.

2.3. The religious history of Thailand:

Prehistoric period: Animism and Primitive believes:

Since the time of Prehistoric period, although the evidence of religious affinity has not been clearly provided from any archaeological site, there is some support on the worshiping activities related to animism belief and funeral tradition. Especially, from Neolithic to Iron age, many of the excavated sites during this period are burial sites located in the central part and northeastern plateau such as Ban Kao, Ban Chiang, Kok Panom Dee, Ban Naa Di, Nong Noe, Pong Manow and Ban Prasath etc. These burial sites contained a wealth of knowledge in prehistoric life like social status and primitive beliefs. For example at Ban Naa Di Iron age burial sites at Udonthani province, northeastern region, the excavation in 1980-81 discovered more than 40 burials.

The funeral pattern has shown the difference of social status in terms of grave goods, measured by number and rare items. The salient feature of this site is the terracotta dolls made in the form of domestic animals and human figures which are associated in the graves (Higham et al 1999: 102). Probably, these objects implied the primitive belief of life after death and animism.

Moreover, at this site also some grave accessories are found, made from crocodile bones like big necklace hanger and cut-bones in female and girl burials suggesting from the same family. Possibly, this pattern was created for totem worship of their family (Higham et al 1999: 105).

Therefore during the period before Buddhism and Brahmanism had arrived in this country, the funeral tradition is the most obvious evidence of the belief of prehistoric people. The evidence from excavations yield at least some kind of primitive concept existed like animism and totem worship. The proper form of religious activities would be found later on in the Pre-Urbanization period that was the great time of social development
as a result of Indian impact and the growth of population leading to the more complex ancient state formation.

The Pre-Urbanization period: (Late 4th century – 13th century A.D.)

This period is also known as Proto-historical period or the time of Early Indian impact. Exactly, the Indian cultural impact has been found earliest in this country during the late Iron Age period from some excavated sites such as Rim Kwa Noi, Ban Don Ta Phet and Khok Phlub in Mekhong – Tha Chin valleys. These Iron Age sites reveal evidences of cultural exchange with India during the Maurya-Sunga period (cir 350-50 B.C.). Considering the available radiocarbon dates, the occupation of Ban Don Ta Phet sites dates from the early of 4th century B.C. and includes special evidences for exchange with sites in South Asia such as Taxila, where very similar bronze bowls and lion amulets have been found (Indrawooth 2005: 38-59; You Di : 1976; Glover : 1986; Rajpitak and Seelay : 1979).

The Dvaravati state: (5th century – early of 10th century A.D)

During the time of intensive maritime trade between India and Southeast Asian countries, besides of the merchandise interest, the cultural relationship also had been existent in this period. According to archaeological evidences, especially from the 4th century to 5th century A.D., there was the stage of early state development where Indian cultural influences had widely been accepted by the Dvaravati state, central and northeastern parts of the country.

Dvaravati is properly regarded as the first historic culture of present-day Thailand and has been roughly dated, mainly by art historical, comparisons with late and post Gupta period (6th to 9th century A.D.).

The Indian heritage was constantly followed by local people such as settlement pattern, town planning, coinage and seal, monument construction, scripts, art inspiration and Indian religions which were Buddhism and Brahmanism.

Both religions had been gradually brought into this region and commonly respected since late 3rd century A.D. The majority of Dvaravati people were Buddhist with regard to the intensive Buddhist art objects found over the Dvaravati state and its cultural subcontinent. Buddhism in this state belonged to both Theravada and Mahayana sects. Obviously, the flourishment of Buddhism in Dvaravati was revived from the majority of Dvaravati art which was dedicated to this religion like images of Buddha, memorial stones
and decorated wheels on the pillar (Dhamachakra). The earliest of Buddhist evidence can be dated back to 3rd to 4th century A.D. by the images of Buddha and some architecture decorations which were influenced from South Indian Amravati style.

Nonetheless, there were Brahmanism influenced in Dvaravati religion especially in U-Thong site, central part of Thailand, where a stone Mukhalinga in Pre-Angkorean style of the 7th-8th century A.D. including some stone linga and Yoni basement were discovered. The occurrence of Saivism in U-Thong site is well supported by the mid-7th century copper plate inscription which mentions gifts of a jeweled litter, a parasol, and musical instruments to Amratakeswar (a form of linga) by the King Sri Harsvaraman who was the grandson of King Isanvarman.

Besides Saivism, Vaishnavism was also found in Dvaravati state. Many of four arms Vishnu sculptures have been found particularly in U-Thong, Sri Thep and Sri Mahabhodh sites. At U-Thong site, the two Vishnu images in stone slabs whose style is really close to South Indian art were found at a small shrine near the site (Indrawooth 1999: 147; Diskul 1975: 19-21). At Sri Mahabhodh site, some four arms Vishnu images were discovered, the images are wearing cylinder head ornament (Kirita Mukhutta), and their style is similar to Pallava sculpture in South India. And at Sri Thep site, besides four armed Vishnu images, the sculptures of Krishna govardhana and Surya have been found from the excavation.

According to religious evidences from several excavation sites, we are able to premise that both Buddhism and Hinduism had been concurrently accepted in the Dvaravati society since the early Christian era. In addition to religious traditional objects, some of the local beliefs were also adapted into Buddhism and Brahmanism also found expression in the form of a number of stone bas-reliefs each depicting the curious bird vehicle (Vahana) labeled as Vanaspati which is the vehicle of the Buddha and his two attendants are standing on it. It is a combination of the character of Hamsa, Garuda and Bull, which are the vehicles of Hindu Gods. This style is a particularly Dvaravati concept and might be influenced by Tantra-Vajrayana school in northeastern India during the Pala Dynasty (Indrawooth 1999:166-167)

Lastly, amulets of Kubera and Gajalakshmi in round terracotta medallions were found at main Dvaravati sites. These were worshipped to ward of misfortune and to bless on wealth from commercial aspects. A number of headless human figurines both male and female, particularly headless men with monkeys, also have been reported from main
Dvaravati sites. Beside these amulet items, the most popular object that always found in the sites is the lion amulets. These might be linked to the ideal of political power and Sakya Simha, lion of Sakya, which means the Buddha (Indrawooth 1999:171-172).

**The Sri Vijaya state:** (4th century - 12th century A.D)

Sri Vijaya state emerged contemporary with Dvaravati state in the southern part of Thailand. Although Sri Vijaya had occupied very vast territory from the Java Island to Malay Peninsula, the location of its capital location has not been so far identified. There is theory of Sri Vijaya capital has been accepte by some historians consistent with many ruins as well as sculptures which have been found in Southern part of Thailand. They assumed it to be the southern Thai region, Chaiya, Wiang Sra and Phunphin district in Surat Thani province. These areas were the center of Sri Vijaya state of the 6th -13th century A.D.

The actual location of Sri Vijaya is therefore uncertain. There is a tendency to believe that its capital moved several times, as was the case with the capital of Javanese Kingdoms. Hence, for Sri Vijaya it is considered that the strength of the state was economic as well as political. The location of the capital at the strategic point near the sea was therefore indispensable.

Sri Vijaya was not only an empowered maritime state, but also famous Buddhist Kingdom, and was visited by Buddhist scholars from India as well as from China. According to the account of I-ching, the Chinese monks were supposed to remain for a certain time to study Sanskrit and the rule of Buddhism before reaching the Holy land. Even in Nepalese manuscript from the beginning of 11th century, Sri Vijaya is mentioned in connection with Lokanatha cult found in the city (Suleiman 1981: 9).

Besides foreign records, some inscriptions which were discovered in Palembang, Java Island indicated that besides a centre of power it was a religious place visited by pilgrimages. The Kedukan Bukit inscription mentions the contribution of Vihara by Buddhist pilgrimage. And the term “Siddhayatra” was found in Prambanan inscription of 856 A.D. meaning the Holy journey (Suleiman 1981: 9).

Moreover the Thalang Tuwu inscription of A.D. 684, mentions the shelter and water supplied for the pilgrims who had come from far places. This record was tallied with the recent excavation at Palembang which yielded several clay stupas and seals that were also found in Bali, Banyuwangi and Borobodur. These objects are usually found near sanctuaries and are votive gifts made by pilgrims.
From the inscription dated at around 7th century, it is evident that Buddhism was followed in Sri Vijaya state. The Sumatra region witnessed the revival of the Mahayana Buddhist evidences such as Heruka statues from Padang Lawas, Buddhist Bhairava with skull cup and knife with inscription referring to Bhairava rites and the Amoghapasa statue found in Jambi, which was sent by Trantric Buddhist whose name was Kritanagara of Singhasari in 1286 A.D. Moreover there is an inscription mentioned about the partition in the realm of King Airlanga (1019-1049 A.D.) who affected it with the help of the Tantric Mahayanist priest (Suleiman 1980: 10).

With regard to friendly relations with Chola Empire of South India in the 11th century A.D., in 1005 during the reign of Rajaraja I, a Buddhist temple was built in Nagipattana (Nagapattam on the Coromandel Coast) by the King from Sri Vijaya and named Chulamanivarmavihara after him. This inscription informs us on the inter-religious relationship between Sri Vijaya state and Chola dynasty. But the good relationship did not remain for a long time probably because of sea-trade rivalry in the time of King Rajendra Chola of Tanjavour. The cultural exchange with south India might be wildly spread along this warfare period, 1025-1089 A.D.

The prevalence of Buddhism in Sumatra does not mean that there were no followers of Brahmanism. The old inventories of the Archaeological service of Indonesia refer to several Hindu sanctuaries, such as the one on Musi river and also that in Padang Lawas.

The same Padang Lawas in North Sumatra must have been the place of Bhairava rites. Dancing yaksas are depicted on the wall of the staircase of Biaro Bahal I. In Pulo, another Buddhist temple in the same area, some of the figures have human bodies and animal’s heads which could have been animal masks like in Tibet where Tantric dances are performed.

There are several Brahmanism as well as Buddhist statues found in Sumatra. It is possible that, as in Java, the same families could be followers of the Hindu or Buddhist religion. Unfortunately, no religious palm leaf manuscripts have been preserved in Sumatra, as they have in Java and Bali.

Similar to Java Island, the Southern part of Thailand also found a number of religious evidences in both Mahayana Buddhism and Brahmanism. There are some ruins which are dedicated to religious aspects. For Mahayana Buddhism, the two brick
monuments as Wat Keaw and Wat Loung were built in order to depict Lord Buddha and Bodhisattava statues. There are several bronze images of Bodhisattava and Buddhist Mahayana goddess generally found along the Southern part and Malay Peninsula such as Padmapani, Avalokitesvara, Vajrasattva and Maitreya Bodhisattava. Although the Mahayana Buddhism had been widespread among the Sri Vijaya people, the Hinayana Buddha images are also found there. The Buddha statue with Naga seat at Wat Hua Wiang, Surathani province, is one of the best evidences of Hinayana occurrence. The form of image was suggested to be influenced from Khmer art around 12th century A.D or late Dvaravati art in the mainland region (Le May 1954: 85-86).

Besides Buddhism, Brahmanism was also practiced in Southern part of Thailand during Sri Vijaya period. There are ruins identified as religious places such as Khao Kha, Khao Pra Narai (Mountain of Narayana) and Khao Sri Vijaya which have revealed objects like some stone or bronze images of Brahmanical Gods like Vishnu, Shiva, Agastya and Ganesh including several religious objects like linga and Yoni basements. Hence it can be surmised that Vaishnavism and Saivism had been followed by a number of locals as according to Chinese royal record of 2nd century A.D. which mentions the Tun Sun state (Southern part of Thailand) where 500 Indian merchants and 1,000 Brahmins had settled down (Kririsk 1980: 23).

Moreover the Hindu living monument at Nakon Sri Dhammarat province, Devalai Bodh Phram is believed to be the Hindu centre of Southern region where the Hindu ceremony has been practiced till the present time.

Besides the immense occurrence of sculptures and monuments, there are some inscriptions which revealed the inter relationship with South India during 5th to 7th century such as Chong Koi inscription, inscription at Khao Pra Narai and Maheyong temple. The scripts were written in south Indian style in Sanskrit language. The inscription generally contained verses in praise of Brahmanical Gods, the contribution of well or water resources and Brahmins in the city.

According to a number of archaeological evidences which deal with Brahmanism in the Southern region of this country, the majority of them have been found along the eastern coast that is more suitable in geographical location, transportation and natural

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4 “Wat” means “Temple” in Thai language.
recourses than the western coast. However the glorious time of Brahmanism lasted until the 8th century A.D. and was gradually replaced by Mahayana Buddhism from Java Island.

**Lopburi Culture; The Khmer cultural dominant period:** (9th century-13th century A.D.)

Similar to the southern region, previously the northeastern and some Central and Eastern part of Thailand used to be under the political governance from Ancient Khmer empire with its capital located in the Angkor city (Siamreap province, Cambodia). Regarding this historical aspect, almost of all Khmer religious heritages had been extensively erected and practiced in these regions. Although Khmer influence had dominated over its territory from the earlier period during 6th to 7th century A.D., there were also found traces of Dvaravati culture which contained Theravada Buddhism in the northeastern region.

The cultural influence from ancient Khmer empire to northeastern and central Thai region (Lopburi culture) was definitely found in various aspects. Although the northeastern plateau was known as the remote area of the great Angkor territory, the characteristics of the religious heritage in this region were mostly similar to the ancient Cambodian Kingdom such as the integration of religious affiliation among Saivism, Vaishnavism and Buddhism. This intensive cultural impact is obviously seen from monuments, inscriptions and sculptures.

The earliest of Brahmanical impact in Northeastern region was certainly during the period of Chenla Empire. According to several old Khmer inscriptions discovered in Thailand (Shaem 1987, Le May 1954: 145), they mentioned one Chenla King “Mahendravarman” who supposedly expanded his empire up to this region and had done some meritorious works devoted to Saivism by establishing Linga and scare tank named Sankara (Shaem 1987). The earliest mention of Vishnu worshipping was found earliest in Prasad Khao Noi inscription (637 A.D.) which referred to the pleading of victory during the warfare to God Narayana (Vishnu) (Shaem1990).

Moreover, we exactly find the Brahmanical images, during late 5th century to 8th century A.D. For instance the images of Ganesh and Ardhanarisvara, both of them have been dated to the 6th -7th century A.D. by their iconographic form and style of art (Diskul 1975: 12). Besides the sculptures, the oldest of Khmer style monument in Thailand is Prasad Phoom Pon located at Surin province. Regarding the brick architecture and decoration which is similar to pre-Angkorean style, they might have been constructed around early 7th century A.D. (Diskul 1967).During the great Angkor period, the Khmer
style monuments in Thailand have been found extensively, especially in the northeastern region which used to be under the governance of ancient Khmer political power.

Besides northeastern part in the lower central region of Lopburi province, there were also found early Khmer style monuments during this period like Prasat Prang Khaek (circa 9th century A.D). The most expansive and glorious period of Khmer arts in Thailand certainly began in the middle of 11th century A.D. due to the conquest of King Suryavarman I who entirely occupied the whole territory of Northeastern plateau and some regions of central Thailand which were commonly known as Lvo or Lopburi region (Ceodes 1969: 100; Hall 1964: 161; Diskul 1967: 11).

The religious integration between Buddhism and Brahmanism was particularly found in the reign of Suryavarman I who named himself as being born of Sun (Surya) and possessing the grace of Vishnu; but it is probable that he was Buddhist by faith as his posthumous name was Nirvanapada. This evidence suggests that Khmer Kings tolerated and patronized all forms of Indian religions leading to the glory of Brahmanism and Buddhism in this region (Le May 1954: 146).

During the 11th century to middle of 12th century A.D. there were a number of important Khmer monuments erected at different regions. In the northeastern plateau, Prasat Khao Panom Rung and Prasad Pimai revived the details of strong Khmer art and religious influence. At Prasad Khao Panom Rung, the monument which was located at the top of Phoo Ang Kan Mountain, the temple was believed to be constructed as early as in the end of 9th century and gradually continued up to 12th century A.D.

According to the temple inscriptions, this religious monument belonged to Pasupati sect who had been worshiped widely over the northeastern region for a long period. Prasad Pimai, the largest Khmer monument in Thailand, is believed to have been constructed from around the 11th-12th century A.D in the reign of Jayavarman VI of ancient Angkor Kingdom and continuously decorated the temple structures until the reign of Jayavarman VII at the 13th century A.D. It is only in Prasat Pimai itself that the combination of Brahmanism and Mahayana Buddhism have been found in the temple, its decorated structures and several sculptures due to the long period of construction which passed through different reigns.
During the reign of King Jayavarman VII around the late 12th century, his personal faith in Mahayana Buddhism resulted in the construction of Ashramas or Arogyashala along the royal roads from Angkor city throughout the border of his territory. The Ashramas consisted of a small stone temple and rest houses or hospitals for pilgrims and travellers. In northeastern region of Thailand, the Ashramas have been found widely as further as Kanchana buri province in the western part of Thailand near the Burma bounder. These monuments were constructed from local laterite which is different from sand stone Khmer temple. There are some important Arogyashala or local hospitals located in northeastern plateau like Kuthi5 Rishi, Prasad Ta Muan Toj, Prasad Nang Ram and Prasad Hin Muang Kao.

In addition to this region, Arogyashala was also found in the central, eastern and western part of country such as Phra Prang6 Sam Yod, Prasad Muang Singh, Phra Prang Wat Kam Phaeng Laeng, Wat Phra Phai Luang and Prasad Khao Lon (Diskul 1967).

After the downfall of ancient Khmer empire around the middle of 14th century A.D in Thailand territory, the Thais tried to establish their own kingdom known as Sukhothai state. Although Khmer political influence had entirely vanished from the country and Thais established Buddhism as the national religion, the Khmer Hinduism heritage had been practiced throughout Thai historical period as well as in the style of art appreciation and royal court rites. Hence, it can be considered as a close knit of cultural and religious relationship between Thai and ancient Cambodian empire and as the meeting place of Indian heritage, especially in religious affiliation which both of these countries had strongly influenced.

The Historical period; The rise of Buddhist Kingdoms:

The rise of Sukhothai Kingdom in 1238 A.D. marks an important point in the history of introduction of Buddhism in Thailand. Before the establishment of this great empire, the Thais were ardent followers of different sects of religion.

According to Chinese accounts, Thais were both Mahayana Buddhists and Brahmanism (Jermsawatdi 1979: 31). The Khmers occupied the territory of Thailand from the northeastern to the central basin and generally were followers of Mahayana Buddhism.

5 Kuthi: In Thai means small house or Ashrama of hermits.
6 Pra Prang: In central Thai language means the structure which constructed in Khmer style, especially in the roof and storey decorations.
and Brahmanism respectively at almost the same time. All in all, therefore, the Thais who were greatly influenced by the Khmers also followed the same religious tradition as their former rulers.

Later on, after the foundation of Sukhothai Kingdom by King Sri Indraditya in 1238 A.D. there was an important development in the religious life of the people in Thailand, especially during the reign of the great King Ram Kham Haeng. It was during this period that the Lanka Vamsa or Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism was first introduced to Thai Kingdom.

**Sukhothai and Lanna Kingdom:** (1238-1370 A.D., 1296-1567 A.D.)

**The growth of Buddhism states:**

Sukhothai Kingdom had adopted the Sinhalese Theravada Buddhism since the reign of King Ram Kham Haeng. Initially, the King sent his formal invitation to Sinhalese monks who stayed at the Ashramas in Nakon Sri Dhammaraj province (southern of Thailand) to visit and purify the Buddhism in Sukhothai. The influence of Sinhalese canon can be seen in Buddhist doctrine itself and also found in several aspects of Sukhothai School of art and architecture, such as bell-shape stupas and Buddha images in the walking posture. These emergences obviously display the Sinhalese aesthetics and dignify motion.

Later on in the reign of King Mahadhammaraja Lithai or Praya Lithai who is also known as the great Buddhist King, during his time Buddhists were given much generous patronization from the royal court and also got acclimatized into public administration. Moreover, the King Lithai had composed an early Thai manuscript concerning the Buddhist cosmology “Tri Bhumikatha” in 1345 A.D.

In the last decade of Sukhothai Kingdom, the venerable Thera Sri Shardha Rajachudamani succeeded in his pilgrimage journey to India and Sri Lanka. Hence, the Sinhalese doctrine had become widespread and colonized more firmly in Sukhothai Kingdom.

The spread of Singhalese Buddhist canon was not commonly known only in Sukhothai, but also the Lanna, neighboring Kingdom of Sukhothai in the north direction. Similar to Sukhothai Kingdom, the Lanna also had the great devoted Buddhist King, Tilokaraj the 13th King of Lanna. He had arranged the first Buddhist council which was
held in Thailand with an association from Dhammadina Thera in 1477 A.D. This event reflected the intensity of Buddhist study during this period.

2.4. The role of Brahmanism in early Thai Kingdoms:

Although Singhalese Buddhism was common in the early historical period, Hinduism which was prevalent from the earlier period also continued to be practiced along with Buddhism. In Sukhothai Kingdom under the reign of King Lithai, who was a great Buddhist supporter, he ordered construction of a Brahmanical temple named Devalay Ksetra Phiman for the depiction of Vishnu and Siva bronze images. In addition to this temple, inside the capital area there are also found the Khmer style stone monuments such as Wat Srisway, Sala Ta Pha Deang and Wat Pra Pay Luang where some Brahmanical Gods images have been discovered during the excavation. Furthermore, traces of Brahmanism in Sukhothai period has been noticed in several inscriptions which mentioned on the grace and benevolence of Gods.

By all means, it can be assumed that Buddhism and Brahmanism had been practiced at the same time without any obstacle and intolerance between their followers. While Buddhism was established as the state religion and given the grand support from royal court, Brahmanism was still constantly practiced and then gradually was merged into Buddhist tradition and royal court rites, as well as the appreciation of Devaraja cult which Thai Kings had employed from ancient Khmer ritual in order to prolong or uplift their own political power.

Ayudhaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin Kingdom: (1350-1767 A.D; 1767-1782 A.D; 1782 A.D-)

The Sukhothai Kingdom after King Lithai’s reign became gradually weak as a result of inability in administration by the successors. Therefore, the Kingdom was annexed to Ayudhaya Kingdom which became the new Siamese capital in 1350 A.D. owing to this transformation; the Buddhist center in course of time was reallocated from late Sukhothai to Ayudhaya Kingdom.

All Ayudhaya Kings since the reign of King U-Thong or Ramadhibodi I, who was the founder of the Kingdom, were ardent followers of Singhalese Theravada Buddhism. During this whole period, Buddhist monasteries were constructed which gave great impetus to the expansion and development of Buddhism in Thailand.
The Ayudhaya Kingdom declined in 1726 A.D. by the ruthless invasion from Burmese and lost the capital’s independence and became a vassal state. This cruel war not only destroyed the whole Kingdom’s stability, but the religious literatures in both Pali and Thai languages are regretfully lost during the difficult time of Ayudhaya Kingdom.

However, even after the destruction of Ayudhaya, Singhalese Theravada Buddhism continued to be the national religion of Thai people. Shortly in 1767 A.D, Thais established their new capital at Thonburi the western site of Chao Phraya River opposite Bangkok. In the reign of King Tak-Sin, he was the only King and also founder of Thonburi Kingdom. He gave orders to repair several temples and settled monastic rules. Regarding the work of religious literatures, he tried to collect and revise the practice of Singhalese Theravada Buddhism.

Since many texts were already destroyed during the warfare, the King had borrowed or copied these manuscripts from Cambodia. After the death of King Tak-Sin, Thonburi Kingdom came to an end and was prevalent only for 15 years from 1767 to 1782 A.D.

In the mid of 18th century A.D. Thais had established their new Kingdom with Bangkok as the capital city. This period started from 1782 A.D. and is commonly known as Rattanakosin period.

The reign of King Rama I of Chakri dynasty began in the year 1782 A.D. As for celebrating the new capital, he had given his official orders regarding the construction and maintainance numerous Buddhist temples in Bangkok. There are two important temples which were newly constructed in this period “Sri Rattanasasdaram temple”, the temple of emerald Buddha and Chakri dynasty, and “Jetupol temple” located near the royal grand palace. From then on, Buddhism was highly respected as the national religion and well cherished among Thais up to present day.

The role of Brahmanism in Ayudhaya, Thonburi and Rattanakosin period:

Since the fall of Sukhothai Kingdom, Ayudhaya adopted the former state culture to their tradition, especially religious rituals. However, to support the Kingship and sustain political power over the vast territory, it was necessary to employ the Devaraja cult from ancient Khmer administration. In addition to political advantage, for upgrading the King’s status to become as high as Sammutti Devaraja (The incarnation of God), they needed to attend several ceremonies that composed by Brahmins who were respected as the representatives of God’s power. In the royal court, the King summoned well-educated Brahmins from both capital and south of Thailand or furthermore up to Cambodian region.
With the balanced support from the royal court between Buddhism and Brahmanism, both religions existed in Thai society from then on.

The court of Brahmins was recruited from time to time. Due to the final destruction of Ayudhaya Kingdom, those Brahmins who escaped from the Burmese enemy fled to Nagara Srithamaraj province. When Thonburi Kingdom had been established, King Tak-Sin recalled them back to the capital for religious consolidation activities and administrative functions. In the early time of Rattanakosin period, King Rama I reformed the Brahmanical role in the new capital. He established the grand Brahmanical chapel of Bangkok known as “Both Phram” for Brahmanical affiliations. During the early Rattanakosin period, some of the Brahmanical royal ceremonies had been arranged like Tri Yam Pvay and Dipavali rites which were performed annually and were canceled in the reign of King Rama VII.

In the present day, Brahmins in Thailand constitute a small society of Bangkok, at the grand Hindu chapel of Bangkok, Hindu Samaj, Sri Maha Umadevi temple and Vishnu temple in Bangkok where many Indians have been migrated to these places. Even now a days, the integration of Buddhism and Brahmanism is obviously found in many Thai rituals, not only in court rites, but also the worship of Brahmanical Gods and Goddess is commonly worshiped among Thais such as Ganesh, Siva, Vishnu, Parvati, Brahma and Indra. On the whole, it can be concluded that the religious affiliation of Thai people from the ancient time have been influenced by both the great Indian religions.

All in all, this was an attempt to understand the role and influence of Brahmanism in Buddhist society like Thailand throughout the ages from the early Christian era to the present time can be seen. However, this research topic is about the study of Brahmanical iconography of Brahmanical deities of 5th - 13th century A.D.

This is supported by two main reasons. Brahmanism was respected by people during the early period which is apparent from the numbers of archaeological evidences found from the sites. Also the pre-urbanization or proto-historical period shows significance of the cultural impact of India and Southeast Asia which was obviously revived from the art influences, especially in Brahmanical images. For these reasons, the study of Brahmanical iconography of Brahmanical deities of the mentioned period is valuable to recreate the development of Brahmanism on the basis of Indian acclimatization before being united with Buddhism.